

To: Brenda Aguilar; Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA)

From: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE); Administration for Children and Families (ACF)

Date: March 13, 2013

Subject: Nonsubstantive Change – Assets for Independence (AFI) Program Evaluation (OMB #0970-0414)

Background

The initial request for the Assets for Independence (AFI) program evaluation involved clearance for a site-specific evaluation in two AFI grantees – Prosperity Works (New Mexico) and Community Financial Resource Center (Los Angeles, CA). At the time of initial clearance, tokens of appreciation to respondents were proposed only for the 12-month follow-up interview. At this time, we are requesting that the clearance reflect our intent to provide tokens of appreciation to respondents for completing the baseline interview.

Rationale for Change

The evaluation did not originally plan to provide tokens of appreciation to respondents at the baseline interview. However, we believe that offering tokens of appreciation may increase participation in the study, which to date has been somewhat low. Respondents are being asked to take part in two 30-minute interviews during the course of their involvement with the study. A total of 224 individuals have had the opportunity to join the study and complete the baseline interview. Of these, only 79 respondents (35%) have completed the baseline interview. According to the grantee staff who are administering intake and the baseline survey, they have received criticism from potential study participants (program participants) that the study will only offer a token of appreciation for their time at the follow-up survey, when the same amount of time is required to complete the baseline survey. Similarly, because the regular application process for the AFI program is cumbersome (i.e., the applicants must provide extensive financial verification), we believe that the additional token of appreciation at baseline may encourage more of these individuals to follow through to participation in the study (and potentially the program). This practice is quite common and effective in survey research. We believe that offering a small token of appreciation at baseline (\$20) may increase participation in the study and build goodwill among respondents. It will also likely increase follow-up response rates.

Current Supporting Statement A language

A.9. Explanation of Any Payment or Gift to Respondents

Our study plan does not include tokens of appreciation to respondents at the baseline interview, but does include a token of thanks in the amount of \$20 for completing the follow-up survey.

At baseline, IDA applicants will have self-selected and be motivated to respond to the baseline interview as part of the program's intake procedures. They will have the opportunity to answer at baseline by self-administration at a site-based computer (or, if necessary, by personal interview with an AFI administrator). At follow-up, however, study participants may be less interested in responding to a telephone survey. The survey collects a significant amount of detailed financial information. At baseline, respondents expect to provide this sort of information as part of entering the AFI program; however, one year later, they may view doing so as burdensome. This may be especially true of control subjects who are not vested in the program. Thus, to prevent differential nonresponse between treatment and control groups, ACF recommends offering respondents \$20 as a token of appreciation in order to improve cooperation at follow-up. Estimates of program impacts may be biased if the respondents in each group are not comparable due to differential group nonresponse.

Proposed Revision to Supporting Statement A

A.9. Explanation of Any Payment or Gift to Respondents

Our study plan ~~does not include~~ tokens of appreciation to respondents in the amount of \$20 at the baseline interview and again upon, ~~but does include a token of thanks in the amount of \$20 for~~ completing the follow-up survey.

At baseline, IDA applicants ~~will have self-selected and be motivated to respond~~ are asked to complete a 30-minute self-administered ~~to the~~ baseline questionnaire interview as part of the program's intake procedures. ~~They will have the opportunity to answer at baseline by self-administration at a site-based computer (or, if necessary, by personal interview with an AFI administrator). The offer of a \$20 token of appreciation provided at this time will encourage individuals to enroll in the study and will engender good will among the study enrollees, important to their continued study cooperation as members of either the treatment or control group.~~

At follow-up, however, study participants are again asked to complete a 30-minute survey, administered to them by telephone. ~~may be less interested in responding to a telephone survey.~~ The survey again collects a significant amount of detailed financial information. ~~At baseline, respondents expect to provide this sort of information as part of entering the AFI program; however, one year later, they~~ individuals may view the need to provide such information ~~doing so~~ as burdensome. This may be especially true of control subjects who are not vested in the program. Thus, to prevent differential nonresponse between treatment and control groups, ACF recommends offering respondents another \$20 as a token of appreciation in order to improve cooperation at follow-up. Estimates of program impacts may be biased if the respondents in each group are not comparable due to differential group nonresponse.

Current Supporting Statement B Language

B.3 Methods to Maximize Response Rates and Deal with Nonresponse

Respondent Tokens of Appreciation. Sample members who complete the follow-up survey will receive \$20 for their participation. This token of appreciation will be mentioned in the lead letter (Attachment J) sent to sample members prior to the survey launch and is intended to encourage, but not obligate, participation. This token will be mailed to them within 2 to 4 weeks after survey completion.

Proposed Revision to Supporting Statement B

B.3 Methods to Maximize Response Rates and Deal with Nonresponse

Respondent Tokens of Appreciation. Sample members who complete the baseline survey and the follow-up survey will receive \$20 for their participation at each juncture. This token of appreciation will be mentioned first in the consent form and again in the lead letter (Attachment J) sent to sample members prior to the follow-up survey launch. In each instance, the token of appreciation ~~and~~ is intended to encourage, but not obligate, participation. For the baseline survey, the token will be provided in a manner decided by the program agency, either in person or by mail. For the follow-up survey, the ~~This~~ token will be mailed to respondents ~~them~~ within 2 to 4 weeks after survey completion.

Current Consent Form Language

SURVEY PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to complete a 30 minute self-administered questionnaire via computer today and then to complete annual follow-up surveys via telephone for the next three years. The question topics include your employment and financial experiences, housing

status and satisfaction, lifestyle and health issues. For each follow-up interview that you complete, which will take approximately 30 minutes, you will receive \$20 as a token of appreciation.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

There are no immediate program benefits or services provided to those completing today's computer survey. For each annual follow-up survey that you complete, you will receive \$20 as a token of appreciation. This evaluation may also generate support for government policies that offer resources to households such as yours for investment in long-term economic growth.

Proposed Revision to Consent Form Language

SURVEY PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to complete a 30 minute self-administered [questionnaire survey](#) via computer today and then to complete annual follow-up surveys via telephone for the next three years. The question topics include your employment and financial experiences, housing status and satisfaction, lifestyle and health issues. For each [follow-up interview survey](#) that you complete, which will take approximately 30 minutes, you will receive \$20 as a token of appreciation.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

There are no immediate program benefits or services provided to those completing today's computer survey. For each [annual follow-up](#) survey that you complete, you will receive \$20 as a token of appreciation. This evaluation may also generate support for government policies that offer resources to households such as yours for investment in long-term economic growth.